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4 September 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. WISNER

SUBJECT: Notes on State-JCS Discussion of Indochina - 4 September

MacArthur:

Decision to send nine battalions from France's NATO forces will be terribly unpopular with substantial sectors of French opinion. If Parliament returns before it can be presented as a fait accompli it is highly likely that the Chamber may repudiate it and bring down the Laniel government. It is perfectly clear that Laniel is the last French premier who has the courage to take a forthright "win the war" approach to Indochina and that any successor government would adopt a policy looking toward ultimate withdrawal short of victory.

The original plan was to get the nine battalions to Indochina by air by mid-September. This date has now been advanced to 1 November which means beginning the movement by 1 October. This in turn requires notification to the French by 11 September of American willingness to foot a large share of the total bill (\$385,000,000). Thus our government must make its decision at the NSC meeting on 11 September and apparently immediately thereafter the President will seek the informal concurrence of Congressional leaders.

Merchant:

Emphasized unfavorable French political situation and stressed that the bulk of the money would go to budgetary aid and that if this course of action proved successful it would provide the best and possibly only chance of French ratification of EDC.

Radford:

Failures in Indochina have been more political than military. The situation has deteriorated particularly with the split of authority following the death of Delattre. The proposed plan if carried out aggressively will "almost certainly" provide sufficient victory in two, or maybe in one, years to permit the substantial redeployment of French troops to Europe. In fact if Salan had acted with any military commonsense last October he could have won a smashing victory. Mr. Dulles's statement at St. Louis will be particularly helpful in convincing the French commanders that they can focus on defeating Viet Minh divisions without concern for Chinese intervention which has in the past caused them to immobilize too much of the Delta Garrison. O'Daniel should come back approximately 1 October because he can speak with much more authority than can anyone permanently on the spot.

MacArthur:

Moreover, O'Daniel would return more or less as a hero for having procured the additional American aid and French troops.

Cabell:

O'Daniel should be given instructions to impress upon Navarre the necessity for stepping up guerrilla activity and taking it under his personal supervision. During his visits to Guerrilla training installations, Cabell was favorably impressed with the quality of the training but feels that the French have set their sights too low in terms of the size and possible achievements of guerrilla forces. If Navarre will really give this point of the campaign his backing

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Radford:

One of the troubles with French attitudes toward guerrilla activities has been their distrust of the Vietnamese recruited for this work.

Ridgeway:

Unimpressed by Navarre. Does not regard his proposals as displaying an offensive fighting heart. Do we give them the entire check and merely hope that they will carry out the appropriate campaign?

Merchant:

The fact that our aid allocation will be drawn down a chunk at a time means that we will have all the control we need to see that French live up to their part of the bargain. Considering the political risk that Laniel is taking, it is not wise for us to insist on any formal step by step series of commitments.

Carney:

If the French and the Viet Nam can knock off the six Viet Minh divisions, what is now a formal civil war can be reduced to a guerrilla, which the Vietnamese can wind up with little or no Europe assistance.

Radford:

The French battalion in Korea is to be moved to Indochina and broken up in order to cadre a regiment. There is no reason why this should involve us in embarrassment with other Korean belligerents because we would permit any of them to move troops from an Armistice area to an active fighting theater.

Devean has created impressions from "pretty good" to "extremely high", and should not adversely affect Navarre's execution of his plan.

RAJr.

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